



Department of Justice

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2002
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TANKER OFFICER INDICTED FOR CAUSING DEATH OF SUBORDINATE CREW MEMBER DURING TANK CLEANING OPERATION

Tampa, FL -- A grand jury indictment returned today charges the Chief Officer of a tanker with causing the death of a man under his command during a tank cleaning operation through misconduct, negligence and inattention to his duties aboard the ship. The defendant allegedly directed a crew member to enter a cargo tank despite the fact that the defendant knew the atmosphere in the tank contained dangerous levels of combustible gas. The indictment was announced by Tom Sansonetti, Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice, and Mac Cauley, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida.

Charged in the grand jury indictment is Gilbert Thurston, the Chief Officer of the S.S. TRINITY and a resident of Naples, Florida. Thurston was employed by the Sabine Transportation Company of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The decedent, Frederic Albert Cambra, Jr., was the pumpman aboard the ship and was working under the command of the defendant. Mr. Cambra was a resident of St. Helene, Oregon.

On May 16, 2000, the American flag tanker completed the discharge of its cargo of methyl tertiary butyl ether ("MTBE") in the port of New York and sailed for Houston to load its next cargo. MTBE is an ether-based petrochemical used as a gasoline additive.

According to the indictment, on May 18, 2000 Chief Officer Thurston was the officer in charge of a tank cleaning operation which was undertaken to remove the residual quantities of the ship's prior cargo of MTBE from the cargo tanks. As the Chief Officer in charge of this operation, the defendant had the responsibility and duty to ensure that the tank cleaning operations were conducted in a safe and proper manner and that no crew member be permitted to enter a cargo tank unless the ship's precautions and procedures for closed space entry were complied with fully. Specifically, it was the defendant's responsibility and duty to ensure that no crew member be permitted to enter a cargo tank unless the tanks's atmosphere was thoroughly tested and a zero reading for combustible gas was obtained.

The indictment charges that the tank cleaning operation was supposed to involve the flushing of the cargo tanks with a small amount of sea water, the pumping out of the resulting sea water and cargo residue mixture, the ventilation of the tanks and, once the atmosphere in the tanks was tested and found to be within safe parameters for manned entry, the entry of crew members into the tanks to mop out the remaining cargo residue.

After entering the tank, Mr. Cambra failed to respond to efforts to contact him by radio. Other crew members equipped with rescue equipment found him collapsed and not breathing at the bottom of the tank. Mr. Cambra failed to respond to resuscitation efforts administered by members of the ship's crew.

An indictment represents charges brought by a grand jury and must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt by the United States in a jury trial. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendants could face up to 10 years in prison and up to a \$250,000 criminal fine (or up to twice the gross gain or loss from the crime).

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